

Putting Veterans to Work

by

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United States Army War College
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

PUTTING VETERANS TO WORK

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ABSTRACT

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The United States government must revise veteran employment programs. After ten years of combat operations, approximately 1,350,000 service men and women deployed overseas have returned home; projections are that one million more will leave military service in the next five years. Today's returning combat veterans find fleeting job prospects and dismal employment opportunities. The Federal government has failed to consolidate its efforts, improve coordination with nongovernmental organizations, and report program performance. These failures directly impact a veteran population suffering from high unemployment rates. An overview of the economic and employment challenges facing returning combat veterans during two wartime periods, World War One and Iraq/Afghanistan, frames this problem by highlighting similarities and recommending opportunities to leverage limited resources. Using these two case studies, the paper recommends eliminating governmental silos in existence since the early twentieth century and permanently consolidating veteran employment services under one Federal department. Involvement by nongovernmental organizations, initiation of strategic communications efforts, and direct interaction with veterans will eliminate disparate and uncoordinated efforts to reduce high veteran unemployment.

PUTTING VETERANS TO WORK

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, nearly three million American men and women have served in our nation's armed forces. After ten years of combat operations, approximately 1,350,000 service men and women have deployed overseas and returned home, and one million more will leave military service in the next five years.¹ As of December 2010, the United States (U.S.) has spent \$31.3 billion on medical care, disability compensation, and other benefits for these veterans.² Nationally, the unemployment rate has hovered near 9% with approximately 14 million jobless Americans. In light of the current national unemployment statistics as well as the large number of combat veterans returning home from war, the United States government needs to revise veteran employment programs and services. Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans' service is "celebrated in occasional television commercials and briefly cheered at sporting events."³ However, veteran unemployment negatively impacts our entire country, and existing Federal programs and policies designed to assist veterans need immediate revision.

The Veteran Unemployment Problem

Statistically, today's veterans face higher unemployment rates than their civilian counterparts. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Americans who served in the military after 2001 and returned to civilian life were more likely to have some college but no degree (33%) than were nonveterans (19%).⁴ Americans under the age of 24, especially those with little or no college education, face an unemployment rate of nearly 16.7%, more than twice the rate for workers 25 and older. As of November 2011, the unemployment rate for this demographic group has been above 16% for 32 months. College graduates age 24 and younger fare better with an unemployment rate of 7.7%.⁵

A veteran with a high school education and discharged after a four-year enlistment is twice as likely to be unemployed compared to his civilian peer with a college degree. A Bureau of Labor Statistics report states that the 2010 unemployment rate for all veterans who served in the military at any time since September 11, 2001, was 11.5%, compared with 9.4% for nonveterans.⁶ A feeling of economic ill-preparedness compounds these unemployment numbers. According to an October 2011 Monster Worldwide Inc. survey, only one-half of veterans surveyed felt military service prepared them to assimilate into civilian life and look for a job.⁷ The Pew Research Center's veteran survey of October 2011, states that post-9/11 veterans are less satisfied with their personal financial situation compared with the general public (20% to 25% respectively), and this dissatisfaction may be linked to their high unemployment rates.⁸ Veterans' feelings of dissatisfaction and ill-preparedness compound the statistical reality of poor employment prospects.

Learning from the Past

American experiences with veteran employment problems in the period after 1918 provides an opportunity to understand similar veteran employment challenges from earlier eras. Never before had the United States maintained a large standing professional army in peacetime. The nation maintained no organized system of mass recruitment or trained reserves; instead it relied heavily on each state's National Guard units for emergencies.⁹ On May 18, 1917, President Wilson signed into law the Selective Service Act of 1917, which created national conscription. In January 1918, Congress declared all men ages 18-45 draft eligible. The US army consisted of less than 300,000 men in April 1917. Conscription augmented the army's ranks by more than three million "emergency" troops nineteen months later.¹⁰ By the war's end nearly

4.5 million men served in the U.S. armed forces, both at home and overseas.¹¹ The Central Powers' sudden collapse brought the First World War to a quick end and presented the United States with an unanticipated challenge. Planning by the War Department for demobilization had only begun in October of 1919.¹² Suddenly the United States found itself with millions of war veterans requiring civilian assimilation but without sufficient ways to achieve these ends.

Demobilization planning did not include veteran employment considerations. Congress passed five major legislative provisions for servicemen welfare in 1917, none of which contained employment measures for the average, healthy war veteran. The legislative acts passed by Congress included such measures as life insurance policies, monetary compensation for death or disability, medical care for disabled, and vocational training and re-education for combat disabled.¹³ Vocational rehabilitation accounted for a small percentage (approximately 2.8%) of the nearly 4.5 million men who served during the First World War. The government expected healthy veterans to return to civilian life and quickly reintegrate into the civilian workforce without the need for any government intervention.

Conscription presented a new paradigm for American society. Jennifer Keene argues that conscription established a social contract between newly-minted citizen soldiers and the Federal government for the lifetime of the wartime generation.¹⁴ From November 11, 1918 through November 30, 1919, the Army demobilized nearly 3.4 million men.¹⁵ It was the War Department's policy to discharge all enlisted personnel "at the earliest possible moment, excepting those who enlisted in the regular Army prior to April 1, 1917, and those physically incapacitated by wounds of battle, accident, or

disease.”¹⁶ The government provided rehabilitation services to wounded soldiers through a separate program administered first by the Federal Board for Vocational Education and then by the Veterans’ Bureau. From June 27, 1918 to June 30, 1928, the government provided disabled veterans opportunities to train for new occupations due to their inability to follow pre-war occupations because of service incurred disabilities.¹⁷ Over 128,000 disabled veterans from the First World War completed vocational training during this time period.¹⁸ Nevertheless, over three million demobilized soldiers suddenly faced unemployment.

Demobilized soldiers experienced a changing geographic and economic landscape immediately following the First World War. Men who demobilized following the Mexican and Civil Wars experienced a nation expanding its economy and territorial holdings providing ample space in which a veteran could seek a new life.¹⁹ Compared to previous post-war periods, and analogous to the situation veterans today, the United States could not easily absorb the sudden reintegration of over three million working-age males. In addition, domestic economic conditions worsened, which exacerbated this sudden population influx. By the end of 1919, the dollar had lost 55 cents of the buying power it had possessed six years earlier. Food costs had risen nearly 84%, clothing costs were up over 114%, and the cost of living was 100% higher than five years prior.²⁰

Compounding these dire economic statistics, the Federal government feared labor unrest. At the height of the war, civilian wartime industries employed nearly seven million workers to operate the industrial machines needed to produce war materiel.²¹ The immediate cancellation of lucrative war contracts placed an enormous economic

burden upon the country. Communities with labor surpluses due to the closing of wartime industries complained of large influxes of returning servicemen. Ellis Hawley asserts that by early 1919, the three most urgent national issues were the large number of unemployed veterans and war workers, canceled allied orders for American foodstuffs, and business fears of impending deflation.²² In 1919, nearly four million workers participated in 3,600 labor strikes. The government did not want millions of veterans involved in radical labor movements or social unrest. However, the degraded economic conditions did not motivate the War Department to improve its demobilization efforts. The War Department's role in demobilization solely served its interest in end-strength reduction.

Instead, the War Department focused on its immediate need to discharge soldiers without considering the impact on the veteran population and American society. Soldiers received discharge certificates at camps nearest their homes, where they received all pay and allowances due plus a \$60 bonus and a new uniform.²³ The government scarcely considered servicemen's economic preparedness to reintegrate into society. Conscription took men for wartime service where they experienced a life much different from their civilian peers. Service members previously employed in unskilled labor returned from their wartime experience with large ambitions and dissatisfaction with returning to unskilled labor.²⁴ Veterans faced the economic reality of unemployment and a rising cost of living. Their absence from the civilian workforce fueled a perception among veterans that post-war economic conditions made them "uniquely handicapped" to compete for scarce jobs.²⁵ Unfortunately, the government did not see a role in serving as facilitator between Federal agencies and nongovernmental

organizations. Rather, it hoped that social welfare organizations like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army could provide services with no Federal intervention. These organizations tried to assist veterans but achieved limited results, often due to infighting and organizational inefficiencies.²⁶ The Federal government missed an opportunity to leverage its resources to influence nongovernmental organizations and alleviate a growing problem.

Early congressional involvement failed to provide sufficient resources to fulfill agency requirements. Congress appropriated funds during the war to increase facilities within the Department of Labor's (DOL) United States Employment Service (USES). USES originated in 1907 and became a separate DOL organization in January 1918.²⁷ USES created the Bureau of Returning Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, a financially constrained organization, ill-prepared to serve the new veteran population.²⁸ Its ineffectiveness originated from poor funding and insufficient staffing relative to the population it was intended to serve. Congress appropriated only \$5.5 million in fiscal year 1919 (July 1, 1918 – June 30, 1919). USES requested approximately \$4.8 million in additional funding but only received \$272,000.²⁹ USES opened labor advisement centers nationwide as well as at points of embarkation in France and England. Through these centers, returning servicemen could obtain employment information and "co-ordinate all the agencies which are playing the game of reabsorbing the fighting forces of the United States."³⁰

Because the Federal government realized it could not succeed on its own, it enlisted the support of various business groups, civic organizations, military councils, and churches.³¹ Generous donations by numerous private organizations allowed USES

to maintain its employment office services. Compounding these financial challenges, many Chambers of Commerce refused to work with USES believing it served as a voice for labor unions.³² Misconceptions coupled with lack of funding prevented USES from continuing veteran services. Failure to secure additional Federal funding resulted in USES relinquishing the majority of its services to state and local government control or shuttering offices altogether.³³ Only in 1930-31 did Congress appropriate additional funds for the establishment of Special Veterans' Employment Offices, much too late to provide timely employment support to demobilized soldiers.³⁴ Early partnerships with the War Department or the Federal Board for Vocational Education to pool talent and limited fiscal resources could have improved the response to these challenges.

Creation of War Department Office

Labor strikes, rapid demobilization, and USES' failure to maintain services necessitated immediate changes to Federal government programs. Initially the War Department created a campaign to convince American businesses and employers to "put fighting blood" in their businesses by hiring or rehiring a recently demobilized soldier.³⁵ Using a play on words reflective of recent wartime experience, the Federal government sought to convince private industry and the American public that veterans possessed the skills and experience to benefit society. However, these efforts failed to create a substantial impact on the rehiring of veterans. In March 1919, Secretary of War Newton Baker approved the creation of the Emergency Employment Committee for Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines of the Council of National Defense (*i.e.*, The Committee), to "supplement and assist" USES' efforts.³⁶ The Committee, under the leadership of Colonel Arthur D. Woods, included economists and well-educated officers charged with formulating reemployment strategies, to include among others specialized employment

services, creative publicity campaigns, and citation awards.³⁷ Woods quickly formed an investigative team to survey the nation's economic and employment climate. In April the team met in Chicago to compare notes, brainstorm, and devise a plan for The Committee.³⁸

The Committee's plan pushed the military beyond its traditional role of a war fighter and broke new ground in its social contract with the country's newly-minted citizen soldiers, a contract that veterans still rely upon today. The Committee saw its duties extending beyond basic demobilization efforts of paying servicemen \$60 and providing them a train ride home. Woods feared that labor unrest, perceived as a manifestation of rising bolshevism and radical unionism, would quickly draw dissatisfied servicemen to its causes as well as create an unstable work environment to which servicemen could potentially return. Sixty dollars and a train ride home would simply not suffice in alleviating these fears and finding a solution to a national problem.

Woods took a creative approach in applying resources and managing human capital. The Committee was comprised of five sections: Publicity, Public Works, Service and Information, Employment, and Personnel and Office Management.³⁹ Woods divided the U.S. into four districts and filled his ranks with nearly 200 career military officers who held business school, graduate, or law degrees. Woods carefully selected soldiers who served overseas as these soldiers would more easily relate to returning servicemen.⁴⁰ Woods quickly recognized the power and influence local nongovernmental and private welfare organizations wielded that could positively impact Federal programs. He instructed the district offices to visit communities and contact leaders to "do anything to get jobs for soldiers."⁴¹ In order to maximize time and effectively manage existing

resources, Woods drew assistance from federal agencies such as the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, and Interior as well as the U.S. Post Office.⁴² Woods augmented the USES' 2,000 nation-wide offices with directors who would be assisted by DOL employees and social welfare agencies.⁴³

Woods' programmatic success relied on garnering positive constituent involvement. The Committee encouraged servicemen to complete employment application cards prior to demobilization. These application cards provided district offices advance warning and previous employment information on the demobilized servicemen returning to their area. District office staff assisted returning servicemen in job placement by matching skills listed on the cards with available employment opportunities. The Committee maintained applications on file, noting applicants who desired to enter new career fields and those willing to sacrifice salaries in order to progress in their careers.⁴⁴ It also taught returning servicemen how to make themselves marketable to prospective employers. The Committee wrote a popular pamphlet titled "Where Do We Go from Here? This is the Real Dope," which provided servicemen advice on matters such as getting a job, employment bureaus, and general demobilization information.⁴⁵ The Committee distributed nearly three million copies of this pamphlet at debarkation ports and on returning ships. Another popular booklet, titled "That Job – Your Rights" offered servicemen advice on proper personal behavior when accepting and leaving a job as well as other details regarding veteran allotments, insurance, and bonuses.⁴⁶ This active approach of working directly with returning servicemen and encouraging their participation paid off. The War Department's fiscal

year 1918 end-of-year report stated that government employment services placed sixty-six percent of registered applicants.⁴⁷

Effective Federal programs included partnerships with organized bodies outside of government. Woods fostered relationships with service organizations and the Chamber of Commerce eliciting assistance and support.⁴⁸ He charged The Committee with outreach activities that included mailing thousands of letters weekly to companies, sending daily press releases to major newspapers, and publishing articles and advertisements in major U.S. magazines and journals. The Publicity Section used bumper stickers, posters, and other venues to spread the message that hiring veterans benefitted business and America. As part of its public-private outreach efforts, the War Department financed an education and information campaign for employers, churches, services organizations, and the general public. Woods continued to augment the information campaign with a national employer citation, awarded to businesses that hired back its veterans. An extensive ad campaign with major newspapers, magazines and over 1,200 Chambers of Commerce publicized the names of these companies.⁴⁹ Woods personally contacted executives from large companies and outlined several reasons why hiring a veteran was good for business and for the Nation's economy.⁵⁰

Despite success as the first effective Federal advocate for veteran employment interests, Woods envisioned an abbreviated organizational lifespan. He recommended to the Secretary of War that the Secretary eliminate The Committee when it completed its work or the economic situation no longer required its services. The Secretary terminated The Committee in December 1919 based on the committee having completed its work. The immediate task complete, there appeared to be no need to

maintain a government program. Nongovernmental organizations could provide further social services. Reports from USES and welfare and civic organizations indicated that from December 1, 1918, to December 27, 1919, of the 1.3 million servicemen who registered with The Committee and its services, 70% were placed in jobs in 500 cities.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the social contract between citizen soldiers and the Federal government did not disappear with the end of The Committee's existence. Nearly two years passed before the earliest vestiges of a national veteran advocate appeared with passage of the 1921 Sweet Act, creating the Veterans Bureau. The Bureau's creation led to the expansion of this social contract through a widening array of benefits and services designed to assist veterans. Ultimately, this resulted in the creation of the Veterans Administration in 1930.

The Committee's focused efforts exemplified the Federal government's success in managing a national-level program when a lead agency was identified and provided the proper resources and staffing. This nearly century-old program provides a prime example of a whole-of-government approach to a national crisis prior to the introduction of such modern-day concepts. Our current Federal government should heed the historical lessons presented by Colonel Wood's committee. Those lessons include naming one organization as the lead agency for all matters pertaining to veteran employment. Colonel Woods possessed the confidence of the Secretary of War and the authority to create a dynamic organization where Woods could hire experienced staff with clear affinity to veterans. The results of the initial employment assessment in April 1919 quickly developed the vision and end state that drove Woods' efforts. Woods' Committee rapidly established relationships with public and private ventures such as the

Chamber of Commerce to use its nation-wide power as well as its influence at the local level. Public information campaigns and the rapid dissemination of information served as a force multiplier to employment service staff, creating enthusiasm among the general populace as well as in the business world through public recognition of businesses that hired veterans. The Committee wisely employed the national media to its advantage and to the benefit of the individual veteran.

Current Veteran Assistance

Nearly a century later, the Federal government has still only begun to address the economic woes of our nation's wartime veterans. After nearly a decade of sustained combat operations and nearly three million having served in uniform (over one million of those overseas), our government has failed to consolidate its efforts and coordinate with private/public enterprises, determine a lead agency, and make sustainable progress. Aggressive goals articulated through multiple press releases displayed on multiple web sites and social media are of little value without a lead advocate managing government resources and the nation's expectations. The employment problem has not changed since the days of the Great War, and veterans are out of work at a higher percentage than the general non-veteran populace.

Today's unemployment problem, no less than that of 1919, requires a creative approach to incorporate the various services offered by Federal, nonprofit, and private organizations. However, attempts to clarify programmatic responsibility and determine redundancies prove difficult as many groups operate independently with no relationship to Federal programs. Organizations range from corporate advisors and mentors who connect veterans to business leaders, to groups that offer employment assistance and counseling services.⁵² Another corporate venture involves linking veterans with

corporate recruiters to job search and placement. Recently, sixteen private industry firms joined efforts to hire thousands of veterans by 2020.⁵³

Determining which Federal agency speaks authoritatively on veteran employment proves impossible. Congress intended for DOL to oversee Federal veteran employment programs, through the passage of a law that created the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) program. This program originated in 1926 with the establishment of the Veterans' Employment Service. Today, VETS operates 52 national offices to "assist and prepare veterans in obtaining meaningful careers ... protecting their employment rights."⁵⁴ DOL also manages a "one-stop" website for veteran employment, training, and financial help, among other services.⁵⁵ The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides assistance designed to "maximize the availability, applicability, and usability of all administration small business programs for veterans, Service-Disabled Veterans, Reserve Component Members, and their dependents or survivors."⁵⁶ The Departments of Labor, Defense, and Veterans Affairs joined efforts to create an information repository, the National Resource Directory (NRD), which provides veterans access to thousands of services and resources at the national, state, and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.⁵⁷ Federal agencies provide no indication of programmatic responsibility or authority regarding an overarching strategy and end-state. Veterans do not have a Federal voice to speak on their behalf and "own" the veteran employment problem. Without a Federal veteran advocate, numerous nongovernmental organizations will continue to provide veterans a broad and disorganized range of services.

Veteran employment policy and strategy do not reside with the VA nor does the VA have a business office dedicated to veteran employment. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) holds the legal responsibility, per Title 38 of the United States Code, to administer the laws providing veterans' benefits. Organizationally, VBA consists of five lines of business, one of which assists veterans who have service-connected disabilities obtain and maintain suitable employment.⁵⁸ However, VBA holds no overarching responsibility to manage veteran employment and economic opportunities. A 2010 executive order charged SBA to lead an interagency task force on veterans small business development, to consider the feasibility of providing hiring incentives and procurement opportunities for small businesses.⁵⁹ The task force recommended that VA be charged with considering the task force's recommendations. In late August 2011, the Secretaries of Defense and VA announced the formation of a joint task force with the White House economic and domestic policy teams and other Federal agencies, such as the Departments of Education and Labor and the Office of Personnel Management. The Secretaries directed the task force to evaluate the efficacy of current policy and make recommendations to an executive steering council on matters such as education and training, transition, entrepreneurship, and employment. Task forces form, make recommendations, and dissolve, yet an overarching theme endures: the need for a consolidated approach to address unemployment problems of returning wartime veterans.

Eighty years of experience notwithstanding, a consolidated approach continues to elude our nation and its veterans. In the late 1990's, the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs supported The Congressional Committee on

Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance (*i.e.*, The Congressional Committee) to review, among other programs, veteran employment. In a letter to Congress dated January 14, 1999, the committee noted that “it is absolutely unacceptable that the unemployment rate for newly separated veterans ... exceeds that of non-veterans the same age by over 20 percent. The programs and institutions entrusted with the responsibility for veterans’ employment have failed.”⁶⁰ The committee recommended that Congress determine the feasibility of combining the DOL programs with the VA programs should DOL fail to show progress and achieve performance goals within two years. Congress did not pursue this recommendation.

Congress noted recent failures by Federal agencies to alleviate rising veteran unemployment but failed to pass legislation or provide agencies with resources to solve the problem. Six years ago, the Senate’s Committee on Veterans Affairs conducted a hearing on veterans’ employment programs and their utility. The committee convened two years prior to the economic recession of 2008. The committee found that employment rates among young veterans had risen dramatically, approaching double the unemployment rate of non-veterans in the same age cohort. Additionally, the Senate committee stated that DOL lacked positive performance results and accountability.⁶¹ Programs, as currently structured, are not helping veterans most in need, and the Federal government must seriously consider making fundamental changes to veteran employment services.

Federal agencies maintain independent programs with little regard for information sharing, to the detriment of the agencies and veterans. Unlike Colonel Woods’ Committee, today’s Federal government cannot directly measure program success

through veteran employment. VA, DOL, and others provide veteran benefits without sharing information or tying benefits usage to employment success. The VA does not provide benefits usage information to improve DOL veteran employment programs. DOL does not share information with the VA on veterans' post-matriculation activity.

We Must Do More

Today's veteran employment woes demand permanently consolidating all Federal employment services under one department. The Congressional Committee's recommendations from 1999 and the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs' opinion from 2006 require serious consideration. Individual agencies have failed to effectively maintain employment programs for demobilized soldiers. Over twelve years have passed since the issuance of the joint committee report, and veteran unemployment rates continue to rise. A Bureau of Labor Statistics report issued in May 2010, noted that for male veterans alone, unemployment rates from 2001 – 2009 rose from 3.5 to 8.5 percent.⁶² Change is needed. Without consolidation, agencies will continue to manage individual veteran employment programs. Adding new projects and programs to the current operating environment is not the solution.

President Obama's recommendation to consolidate multiple Federal agencies offers a viable approach to veteran employment problems. On January 13, 2012, the President asked Congress to consolidate the roles of several federal agencies dealing with small businesses, which he stated would streamline services and lead to a smaller government.⁶³ Numerous benefits will be gained by applying the same approach to veteran employment programs. Under this approach, the Department of Veterans Affairs will administer all Federal veteran employment programs. VA will acquire all DOL veteran employment programs, personnel, and funds. Consolidation means no loss of

service to the veteran and will alleviate confusion over which department is responsible for the delivery of veteran employment services. It enables one executive agent to advertise, inform, and educate veterans, the general public, and employers. More importantly, veterans will receive employment assistance from the executive agent responsible for administering veteran education and disability compensation benefits. VA manages veteran education programs, most notably the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. VA also provides compensation benefits to eligible veterans based on service-connected disabilities. Consolidation will allow VA to logically link education, disability compensation, and employment programs as a holistic service. Streamlining federal veteran services is akin to Colonel Woods' efforts to quickly consolidate government employment programs following the First World War and gain economies of scale through sole source funding. One departmental secretary will report to the White House for veteran employment oversight and accountability.

The Federal government does not maintain veteran employment information to link veterans to potential job opportunities. Unlike the application cards completed by returning servicemen and held by The Committee's bureau offices, the Federal government doesn't maintain a central information repository. Should a veteran consent, he/she should be free to submit past employment information, current employment desires, and education and training experience to a VA-managed database. An information repository allows VA to coordinate with public and private organizations looking to hire veterans, both at national and state levels. The NRD partnership between the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs connects wounded warriors, service members, veterans, and their families and provides ample

information to the veteran.⁶⁴ However, efforts such as the NRD fall short of a coordinated Federal effort to receive veterans' employment information for dissemination to nongovernmental organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, state-run enterprises, and local municipalities.

Nongovernmental organizations help veterans through their nexus with all levels of government and private industry. The Chamber of Commerce is one such organization capable of linking the veteran community and businesses to a consolidated Federal employment program. The Chamber's role as advocate for veteran employment includes a noteworthy history and provides a prime example of how the Federal government can expand its efforts through bold cooperative opportunities. Colonel Woods fostered a strong relationship with the Chamber. For several months in 1919, numerous articles appeared in the New York Times demonstrating the bond between the two groups. However, until recently, the Chamber of Commerce has not partnered closely with the Federal government to address current veteran unemployment. In March 2011, the Chamber announced the "Hiring Our Heroes" program, a year-long nationwide partnership effort with DOL to assist veterans and their spouses find "meaningful employment." Since launching the program, the Chamber has hosted over 60,000 veterans and spouses at hiring fairs with nearly 3,500 veterans and spouses finding employment.⁶⁵ Although the Chamber will maintain this veteran employment program until March 2012, it wasn't until December 2011 that the executive branch recognized these efforts. At a recent Chamber of Commerce event, the White House and the Chamber announced that they would join forces to address veteran unemployment.⁶⁶ Direct White House involvement comes after 10 years of sustained

combat operations and nearly six years since Congress issued a statement on the lack of progress made in reducing veteran unemployment. In addition, the joint-employment initiative's efforts to boost service members' spousal employment weaken potential opportunities to improve veteran employment. Service member spousal employment programs divert limited resources directed at reducing veteran unemployment. These efforts, though praise worthy, have been initiated slowly while veteran unemployment remains greater than the national average.

Fiscal austerity necessitates the availability and use of consolidated performance metrics. Currently, divergent agency efforts and a lack of consolidated information prevent the Federal government from providing an assessment of program performance. The War Department's Emergency Committee reported a 70% employment success rate for those veterans who registered. The Federal government collected this data prior to computers. Information available today must be incorporated to measure program effectiveness. Recently, the Federal government advertised that a select group of private companies plan to hire 100,000 veterans and service member spouses by 2014. A noble goal, but performances metrics from this private venture must be linked to Federal veteran employment programs, such as DOL's "Veteran Gold Card" or the "Veteran Job Bank."⁶⁷ Veteran employment programs must link activity to productivity and measure performance in order to determine where and when to apply Federal resources.

The Federal government must leverage multiple media outlets to publicly recognize organizations as well as inform veterans. Much like Woods' Committee, the Federal government must utilize available advertising avenues to promote programs

and recognize private sector achievements in hiring veterans. Recent media research shows that GenXers (born 1965-1976) and Millennials (born 1977- 1994), the two generations heavily affected by rising unemployment, derive their information from print second only to the internet.⁶⁸ Mrs. Obama announced at the Chamber of Commerce event of December 2011 that the International Franchising Association committed to hiring 80,000 veterans and military spouses, to include 5,000 wounded veterans, by 2014.⁶⁹ This major commitment on the part of a private organization needs immediate recognition. These facts must be at the front of VA's web page to enlist support by the general public and recognize the superior efforts of nongovernmental organizations and private consortiums. Social media allows for rapid, succinct communication with today's veterans. Messages delivered in 140 characters convey the Federal government's strategic message and intent. Dissemination of hard copy pamphlets such as The Committee did in 1919 is no longer necessary. However, the Federal government must disseminate three million virtual copies of information. Public recognition via social media trumpets the success of the programs and advertises to families, friends, and neighbors of wartime veterans that services are available. Consolidation of the message is essential to long term success of a much needed strategic communications effort on the part of the Federal government.

Conclusion

With 52% of U.S. companies recently reporting difficulty in filling jobs, the Federal government has an opportunity to reduce veteran unemployment.⁷⁰ Still, the Federal government spends billions of dollars every year providing services to veterans, and veteran unemployment remains higher than the national average. Disparate and uncoordinated application of substantial resources hampers success at a Federal level.

Concerted efforts on the part of Congress and the Executive Branch must call for the consolidation of Federal veteran employment programs into a sole logical executive agent: the Department of Veterans Affairs. Several committees have highlighted these programmatic shortcomings. History provides us with a fitting example of how success is achievable through the consolidation of resources and authority, effective partnerships with nongovernmental organizations, and efficacious messaging to the veteran population. Colonel Woods' efforts to push the bounds of traditional government roles and responsibilities created a template for emulation. The Federal government cannot achieve success on its own.

The government can learn from The Committee's creative approach to leverage the strength of nongovernmental organization and social welfare institutions. Joining efforts with nongovernmental entities improves the likelihood that America will put veterans to work. Woods mastered the art of strategic communications by directly involving mass media outlets and building relationships with business leaders to spread the message and motivate society. Much like veterans of World War One, today's veterans will pursue Federal assistance when properly informed and provided an opportunity to participate. Our government must take deliberate action to revise veteran employment programs or risk allowing our veterans, who have served honorably during wartime, to suffer unemployment at rates higher than the population they served to protect.

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